

Oregon

Creating More Healthful Worksites

Challenge

Nearly 60% of adults in Oregon are overweight or obese.* For those employed outside the home, creating workplace environments and policies supportive of healthful eating and daily physical activity is one way to prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases.

Response

In 2005, the Oregon Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) Program launched a new worksite wellness initiative in numerous state government offices as well as at worksites at the University of Oregon. In all, more than 9,400 state employees will be reached through this initiative. Several hospitals and clinics run by Samaritan Health Systems, a 4,500-employee business in Oregon's Willamette Valley region, also plan to join the program. This intervention combines a traditional health promotion program focusing on individual behavior change and group activities with the broader, long-term goals of changing worksite policy and environment. The program aims to increase access to healthful foods; promote and support daily physical activity; foster environments and policies that support and encourage lifestyle choices leading to a healthful weight and decreased risk of chronic diseases; and help employees identify health risks and provide them with a referral system for weight and disease management programs.

Members of the PAN Program, the state's Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention, and the Arthritis and Diabetes Programs are working with the Oregon Public Employees' Benefit Board to provide training and technical assistance to state agency wellness coordinators and committees. They will also collaborate with Oregon State University to provide similar information and resources to Samaritan staff.

In 2005, Oregon launched a work site wellness program that aims to serve 9,400 state employees by combining a traditional health promotion program with broader, long-term efforts to change worksite policy and environment.

Results

While the worksite intervention has the long-term goal of dietary and physical activity behavior change as well as reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity among employees, it encourages employers to undertake a variety of short-term efforts that can begin to build a more healthful environment. They include:

- Offering health-risk appraisals and screenings;
- Creating both a chronic disease self-management program and a referral system for outside programs;
- Promoting weight-management classes;
- Implementing policies that support mothers who continue breastfeeding after returning to work;
- Changing the environment to support and promote the availability of healthful foods and beverages (e.g., a kitchen for food preparation and a refrigerator to store perishables); and
- Making policy and environmental changes that make the workplace more conducive to physical activity (e.g., flex time, non-car commuting incentives, bike racks, showers, and access to any onsite fitness facilities).

What Else is Oregon Doing to Address Overweight and Obesity?

The state plans to:

- Collaborate with the U.S. Department of Education to develop standards and guidelines for competitive foods sold in schools.
- Explore a statewide policy of required standards for physical education in elementary and middle schools.
- Begin three projects funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that will: help create a mixed-use community with an integrated system of streets, parkways, and greenways; help residents of a low- and middle-income community in Portland improve their options for using light rail, walking, and biking for transportation; and focus on the design, building, and promotion of an interpretive trailhead in southeast Portland to encourage walking and biking in this low and middle-income community.

For more information, e-mail PAN Program Coordinator John Chism (john.w.chism@state.or.us).

**CDC BRFSS, 2005*